

**Evelyne Hum, Haeger et Schmidt Logistics.**

**Evelyne Hum is the director of Strasbourg's and Khel's branch of «Haeger & Schmidt» Logistics. This commission agency of multimodal transport is a company founded 100 years ago specialized in inland waterway transport. Its headquarters are located in Duisburg. It carries goods between Alsace and Rotterdam by the Rhine.**

**How did you respond to the problem of low water level in 2018?**

The low water level periods have always been a major problem and some reflexions about this phenomenon had already emerged before 2018. But this problem has increased and its negative consequences have been expanded. In 2018 there was a severe crisis: we had no memory of such a long period with such a low water level. It is linked to global warming, and specifically to the melting of the glaciers, a phenomenon that intensified in the 20th century, that fills the lake Constance. Similar periods had been observed the last century. These low water episodes hit all along the Rhine, from its source until Rotterdam. But the most affected area is located in Rhine middle part, between Strasbourg and Duisburg.

Small work groups have been created in the frame of the Clim'Ability program which aims at reflecting to some alternatives and solutions concerning the river transport issues during flooding and mainly low water periods.

This allow us to meet various companies with different problems to deal with. And, as a consequence, we were obliged to think all together and to position ourselves in front of the facts. These companies belong to various economic sectors, and we even worked with firms which were not our usual partners. They are dealing with issues and consequences that are not necessarily similar to ours: it was fascinating to discuss with operators from different sectors and to discover new aspects we not knew. The methodology developed proposes careful investigation of different possible pathways, free exchange of ideas... then what had been said was analysed... But in terms of solutions, it seemed a bit theoretical to me...

**Do you mean that the participants had difficulties to find practical solutions?**

Theoretically speaking, we can imagine a lot of solutions, but we know that they could not be put into practice, at least in the short term. Rhine draining, river digging, designing and constructing new types of ships: all these solutions have been already accomplished. I discovered these last years the ships have been already adapted. The technological progress reached is very high and could not be overcome. We need 50 years to build new sluices on Rhine. So, ultimately, we became aware that all quick and possible solutions have been already implemented.

On the other hand, in terms of the group work, progress has been noticed. There are already contacts between the different operators who were willing to respond to the problems by optimizing their tools. Since 2010 new restrictions in the ports have been enforced: The marine terminals have imposed a minimum number of containers. River and maritime unions have been created, in order to share places on ships, so they can optimize the load and weight of each ship. The fact of being colleagues and competitors on the same time, positioned in the same market, is no more an insurmountable

obstacle ... since it has become a necessity due to the new regulations and the problems which arise with the low waters.

These agreements between companies may increase. At the local level, we are not so many people in this sector, so it's not so difficult to communicate each other. On a certain number of subjects we have to be united. It is already the case for some issues, like our discussions with the City to improve the access of the trucks to the port area.

### **Multi-modality is one of the main answers to these problems. How is it developed?**

By taking into consideration our history and our values, we are a river transport company. Our ships transport containers and merchandises (bulk products), including final products, objects, clothes from Asia, spare parts, electronic, parts etc. On the export side: beer, flour, paper, wood... Each good moves by ship from Strasbourg to Rotterdam or Antwerp and the to Africa. In the opposite direction, trucks are used in order to transport goods from the port to their final recipients. This part should be as limited as possible, no more than the 15% of the entire distance.

The river shipping allows cost-effective transport of large amounts of products. Indeed, it would be impossible to find enough trucks to carry 20 to 25 containers per day. Also, it takes about 72 hours for a ship to go from Strasbourg to Antwerp, between 12 and 24 hours for a train and just one day for a truck, while the price is inversely proportional to the time spent. Every company chooses a transport mode, according to the value of the merchandises (transported goods). In addition, river shipping is more sustainable and ecological, an aspect really significant for «Haeger and Schmidt», because the environmental concern contributes to our DNA. We have evolved by trying to use railway, which is quite complicated in France because of the necessary booking of train routes. Therefore, it is not as simple as a big waterway on which you just need to place a ship on! We are able to send three or four trains by week.

We are forced to use trucks, as well. After facing the losses of market share, the road has now become unavoidable, while 100 years ago we were only using the waterway transport... The "Multimoday" trade fair, that took place on September 30, 2021, was considered like the continuity of a workshop that we've already done, in which we observed that many of the customers strayed from the river transportation. It was outlined there that the river transport should continue to be promoted, in relation to the contemporary climate issues. But the issue which dominated the debates was the health crisis which affected and disrupted our working methods in a more urgent way, than the low-waters.

### **To sum up....**

Discussions have been initiated and this is a very positive outcome of these workshops. I would like to continue the discussions, even if the problems have not necessarily been solved. It is important to be able to exchange with other professionals, to better know each other... It could be useful for other subjects related to climate change...